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ABSTRACT

Outcomes of a mainstreaming program implemented in 1984 by the Winooski Public School District (Vermont) are presented in this paper. All children in the community receive their education in general education classrooms and community settings. This paper identifies the evolutionary processes and key organizational and instructional practices that have enabled district restructuring for diversity. Steps involved in the process included the development of a mission statement, an in-class service delivery model, teaching teams, student-teacher collaboration, and the redefinition of student, teacher, and administrator labels and roles. One table is included. (Contains 24 references.) (LMI)

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RESTRUCTURING FOR DIVERSITY

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A plethora of recommendations have been offered for reforming or restructuring North American schools. Recommendations for improvement have focused upon areas such as school governance, teacher empowerment, toughening of academic standards, lengthening the school day or year, and the use of alternative instructional strategies such as cooperative group learning (Friend & Cook, 1990). A big question is how special education fits in with the total school reform movement (Pugach & Sapon-Shevin, 1987). Emerging evidence of the inadequacies of separate special class and "pull-out" programs and the benefits of educating students with moderate and severe disabilities within their local communities and schools has opened educators' eyes to the need for restructuring special as well as general education (Brown et al., 1989; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989). Some propose the elimination of the dual system of general and special education and propose the invention of a unified school system capable of educating all of a community's children in local neighborhood schools (Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Thousand & Villa, 1990; Villa, Thousand, Stainback & Stainback, 1992; Williams, Villa, Thousand & Fox, 1989).

In 1986, Madeline Will, the then U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education, called for what came to be known as the Regular Education Initiative (REI) -- general and special education sharing the responsibility for educating students who present learning and behavior challenges. The Winooski (Vermont) School District is an educational system entering its tenth year of working to effectively respond to this call. All children in the Winooski community, including those experiencing moderate or severe disabilities, receive their education in general education classrooms and community settings . The school's approach to improving the quality of education has been to pay close attention to general and special education literature regarding the emerging exemplary educational practices that support the education of a diverse student body and to experiment with various school restructuring recommendations. What have been the evolutionary processes and the key organizational and instructional practices that have enabled the Winooski School District to restructure for diversity?

Restructuring to Create a Climate of Equality and Equity

An important first restructuring step for Winooski was the development and ratification of a mission statement. The statement forwarded three notions supportive of inclusive schooling: (a) all children can learn; (b) all children deserve the opportunity to be educated with similar-aged peers in their local school classrooms; and (c) the school district is responsible for meeting the unique educational and psychological needs of all of its community's children. A critical next step was the development and implementation of a longitudinal inservice training agenda that had two objectives. The first objective was to garner support for school reform by educating the school and greater community about the rationale for inclusive education. The second objective was to give school staff the skills to carry out the vision of schooling articulated in the school district's new mission statement. It is significant to recognize that this training agenda was formulated by an inservice planning committee that represented every stakeholder group within the school. The committee was comprised of a teacher majority, with additional representation from the paraprofessional staff and the administrative team. From 1985 to the present, there have been numerous training events delivered through a broad range of instructional formats (e.g., university courses, workshops, summer leadership institutes, professional leave for conference attendance or presentations, mentoring with a colleague in effective instruction). The topical areas addressed to date are listed in Table 1 along with the percentage of school personnel receiving "knowledge" versus "skill acquisition" levels of training in each topical area. Knowledge level training refers to 1/2-day or full-day learning opportunities in which participants interact with materials and are offered models or examples of the particular concept or process. Skill acquisition instruction refers to two or more days of instruction along with guided application, coaching, and feedback in the environments in which the skill will be used.

Insert Table 1 about here

Historical Perspective

In June of 1984, the regional special education classrooms for students labelled educably and trainably mentally retarded, that for years had been housed in Winooski, were closed. This event followed 18 months of planning and negotiating with neighboring school districts and the Vermont State Department of Education's Special Education Unit. Students in these classes who resided in other school districts were returned to their "home" school districts. Winooski children were placed in age-appropriate general education classes and provided special education support through a combination of consultation services to classroom teachers and "pull out" instruction in a resource room area.

By the end of the 1986-87 school year, only a handful of "special education" eligible children received any support services outside of the classroom, although students eligible for "compensatory education" and "gifted and talented" services at times still were pulled out of classrooms for instruction. . Additionally, there had been a teacher-initiated reorganization of the middle grades (grades 6, 7, 8). Students were rearranged into heterogeneous, multi-aged groupings, and the middle grade teachers formed a collaborative planning and teaching team called the PRIDE team (Villemaire, Malcovsky, Keller & Carter 1988). The PRIDE team is interdisciplinary (representing the curriculum areas of science, math, language arts, social studies, and reading), and its members share a common planning period (supplemental to their individual preparation periods) during which they coordinate curricula; address instructional and student behavior issues; and meet with students, families, and specialized support staff. The middle school curriculum rotates over a two or three year period, and members of the team often team teach. Students stay with this team of teachers for three years, and each student has one teacher assigned as an advisor who confers daily with advisees during a "student advisory" period.

Given these changes, the entire system was primed to restructure the support model for all children - those eligible for "compensatory education" services, those identified as "gifted," as well as those needing "special education." Beginning in September of

1987, students eligible for any specialized support could receive that support within general education settings, through an "in-class" service delivery model.

Redefining the Role of Educators and Administrators

In addition to its effort to provide a quality education to a diverse student body by merging human resources through an in-class support service model, a conscious and concerted effort was made to eliminate the categorical labels (e.g. regular, gifted, special, compensatory) traditionally assigned to students, staff, materials, rooms, instructional procedures, and behavior management practices. Special versus general education professional labels were dropped, and job functions usually performed by special versus general educators were noncategorically distributed across all members of the school's instructional staff (Villa & Thousand, 1988). A single job description, labelled "teacher," has been created for all professional educators (e.g., classroom teacher, "former" special educators, guidance personnel, speech and language pathologists). An important feature of the job description is that it explicitly states the expectation that teachers will collaboratively plan and teach and share responsibility for even the most intensively challenged or challenging of the community's children.

The roles and responsibilities of administrators in the Winooski School District has also been redefined. Traditionally, guidance, health, gifted and talented, special education, and early childhood services and personnel had been separate "departments." In 1983, they all were united into a single department of Pupil Personnel Services (PPS), and the former special education administrator became the PPS director (Villa & Thousand, 1988). Yet this organizational arrangement had its inherent limitations; the clearly specialized nature of the PPS Department limited people's perception of the department. They still saw the department and its personnel as apart from rather than a part of the total educational program. Consequently, in 1989, the PPS Department was dissolved and the former PPS staff joined the general faculty of either the elementary or secondary buildings. The building principals became their new direct supervisors and the PPS Director became a Director of

Instructional Services responsible for facilitating the inservice program for all teachers and paraprofessionals, observing and assisting teachers to develop and execute their annual individual instructional improvement goals, and manage the special education and other support service paperwork (Cross & Villa, 1992).

Promoting Peer Power

"We cannot ask students to do that which we, as adults, are not willing to do ourselves" (Harris, 1987). Specifically, educators who expect children to support and respect one another in heterogeneous educational groupings are compelled to model collaboration by creating heterogeneous adult planning and teaching teams (Thousand & Villa. 1990b).

Today, the majority of the the Winooski School District's staff function as members of teaching teams. A teaching team is "an organizational and instructional arrangement of two or more members of the school and greater community who distribute among themselves planning, instructional, and evaluation responsibilities for the same students on a regular basis for an extended period of time" (Thousand, & Villa, 1990a, p. 152). Any adult or student is a potential member of a teaching team.

Members of effective teaching teams agree to coordinate their work to achieve common, publicly agreed upon goals. The processes employed by Winooski's teaching teams are based upon the collaborative principles of cooperative group learning (D. Johnson & R Johnson, 1987) which prescribe five elements for effective team functioning: 1) face-to-face interaction on a frequent basis; 2) an "all for one, one for all feeling of positive interdependence; 3) a process for the development of small group interpersonal skills in trust building, communication, leadership, creative problem-solving, decision-making, and conflict management; 4) regular assessment of and goal setting for improving relationships and task achievement; and 5) methods for holding one another accountable for responsibilities and agreed upon commitments (Thousand et al., 1986; Thousand & Villa, 1990)

Reporting on their success in responding to the needs of students, Winooski personnel consistently identify their strong

collaborative ethic and teaming practices as the cornerstones of their success. By rearranging instructional resources into teaching teams, students and teachers have benefitted from higher instructor/learner ratios and the ongoing exchanges of knowledge, skills, and materials among team members --outcomes which have a positive impact upon all students, not just those needing special support.

Empowering Students to be Instructors, Advocates, and Decision-Makers

Within education, the term collaboration usually conjures up the image of adults (usually professional educators) working together. In accordance with educational futurist suggestions for "a new collaborative role for teachers and students in which students accept an active senior partnership role"(Benjamin, 1983, p. 9), the Winooski School District has expanded the list of potential educational collaborators to include students. Villa and Thousand (1992) offer several rationale for having students collaborate with adults as instructors, advocates, and decision makers regarding issues of schoolwide concern. First, given the diverse educational and psychological needs of an increasingly heterogeneous student population, schools need to take advantage of all available human resources. Students offer a refreshingly creative, enthusiastic, rich pool of expertise that is a cost effective alternative to hiring additional adult instructional personnel. Secondly, educational reform recommendations call for more active student participation in their learning and more opportunities for students to use and develop higher level thinking skills (Boyer, 1983; Costa, 1985; Glasser, 1986; Hunter, 1982). Schools that structure opportunities for students to join adults to plan, problem solve, and evaluate their own learning, create forums for active student participation and higher-order thinking.

Third, futurists have recognized that for students to become contributing and empathetic citizens and neighbors in adulthood, they need practice during their youth (Benjamin, 1989; Falvey, Coots, & Bishop. 1990). Schools that encourage students to advocate for the educational interests of a fellow student (e.g., a peer with multiple disabilities) promote practice in desired citizenship behaviors. Fourth,

given the current information explosion and the increasingly complex nature of our diverse global society, graduates in the next century will need to have the skills to pool their knowledge and expertise through collaboration. In sum, collaborative skills are a core curriculum area for today's schools, and school personnel have the responsibility to teach and model collaboration by sharing their decision-making power with students in a climate of mutual respect.

Among the collaborative student arrangements that have developed in the Winooski School District are: (a) students as instructors in peer tutoring, cooperative group learning, and adult/student teaching team arrangements; (b) students determining instructional accomodations for a classmate with intensive challenges; (c) students functioning as an advocate for a peer in Individual Education Plan (IEP) or transition planning meetings; (d) students providing social support to a challenged classmate by being a "peer buddy" or as a member of the classmate's Circle of Friends (Forest & Lusthaus, 1989); (e) students as coaches for their teachers, offering feedback regarding the effectiveness and consistency of their instructional procedures; and (f) students as members of school committees (e.g., Discipline Committee). Collaborative arrangements such as these have promoted the desired outcomes of quality inclusive integrated schooling experiences for intensively challenged students, active participation and problem solving on the part of the student population, equity and parity among students and adults, and a spirit of community within the school (Villa & Thousand, 1992).

The Future

The Winooski school community has only begun a journey in restructuring for diversity. It still maintains a number of "traditional" schooling practices and relationships which may inhibit quality heterogeneous educational experiences for children. The process of self-examination, clearly, is an ongoing one for this and any school community. School improvement plans for the immediate future include the extension of teaming models, (e.g., the middle school PRIDE team concept) to the high school. Secondary level teachers are reorganizing the high school master schedule so that they may have more adult team teaching and planning opportunities.

Currently, the vast majority (70%) of the students in the elementary school serve as trained peer tutors; this program is being extended into the middle and high schools. Finally, school personnel have begun to discuss the idea of shifting the time of year when students transition from one grade to the next. Students would enter their next-grade classes in May rather than September, thus allowing students and teachers to adjust to one another and to the new curriculum and routines before the summer break. As part of this proposal, seniors would spend their last six weeks of school practicing "responsible citizenship" by engaging in community service activities which would be documented and submitted as part of their graduation portfolio.

Over the past nine years, the organizational structure, instructional practices, and relationships among adults and students of the Winooski School District have changed dramatically. These changes have been an outgrowth of educators' desire to provide excellent and equitable education for all of the children and youth of Winooski, their jointly understood vision of heterogeneous, inclusive schooling, the ongoing inservice training agenda, and a strong collaborative ethic. Change has become something with which everyone is familiar and which everyone expects. This seems fitting, since "realistically... in the education business ... change is the most stable thing on which we can depend" (Patterson, Perkey, & Parker, 1986, p. vii).

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Table 1

Topical Area & Training Level of Inservice Training Offered Between 1985 and 1991.

Topical Area	Training Level	
	Knowledge Acquisition	Knowledge + Skill
1. Characteristics of Effective Schools	95%	25%
2. Best Practices in Special Education	95%	25%
3. Effective Teaching	100%	40%
4. Cooperative Group Learning	60%	25%
5. Various Models of Assessment and Curricular Modifications	38%	38%
6. Social Skills Training (Adult & Child)	35%	20%
7_ Building Self-Esteem in Children	15%	15%
8. Reality Therapy	100%	45%
9. Control Theory	100%	45%